THE NEWS LETTER

OF THE COLLEGE ENGLISH ASSOCIATION

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English As a Liberal Study

(The Editor of the News Letter follows the policy of giving as little as possible of its limited space to reprints from other publications; preferring rather to call the attention of its readers to such articles. But now and then he departs from that custom for reasons which seem adequate; as in this case, where a lengthy extract is drawn, by permission, from Mark Van Doren's notable volume A Liberal Education, *lately published by Henry Holt & Co.)*

A liberal education is so much more than what passes today as an education in English that the following words of I. A. Richards seem weirdly unreal: "We teachers of English have a great responsibility. We are the guardians of the main channel through which has come down to us whatever is high-hearted, courageous, noble, and passionate in its hopes for man, whatever is faithful, whatever is honorable, whatever is serious and sincere, whatever is most aware of man's nature and his fate, whatever is most ready to uphold and defend it." That is fine, but few teachers of English deserve it. Even if they performed all that their subject made possible they would not be sufficient agents of a liberal education; English literature, great as it is, is less than enough for the purpose. What is meant by calling it "the main channel" through which everything good comes down to us? Platonism in English poetry brings along no more than one per cent of Plato. The question at hand, however, is not so much the importance of English literature as the efficacy of the teaching that prevails in its name.

Much that Huxley and Newman said about classical studies could be said about English studies. It is seldom that the great books in English are greatly read. This is partly because lesser books, on the mistaken theory that they are easier, are preferred; in such a case the great ones are not read at all. It is partly, however, because the teachers lack understanding of what literature at its best can be about. It can be about almost everything, but the student is rarely informed of this. A teacher may be pardoned for not being a genius at criticism, and for failing therefore to render a perfect account of the artistic triumph before him. It is more difficult to pardon him when he dodges in discussion the themes of good and evil, God and man, true and false, large and small, the same and the different. Success on both levels is proper to the full analysis of art, and the teacher would be a better

(Continued on Page Three)

ANNUAL MEETING

Ballots continue to straggle in but a "quorum having been present", the following vote is recorded as the expressed will of the Association. The percentages given are percentages of the total number of ballots received, rather than of the total membership.

1. Do you favor asking all present officers to serve for another calendar year? Yes 94%; No 6%.
2. Do you favor simultaneous regional meetings in place of an annual meeting? Yes 70%; No 25%. (50 different cities are suggested, and the question is often asked, "Why simultaneously?")
3. Do you favor such meetings to be open to all English teachers regardless of membership? Yes 66%; No 17%.
4. Will you serve on the local committee for such a meeting? Yes 60%; No 16%.
5. The date for such a meeting? April 1 far in the lead, and Apr. 30 second.
6. Do you favor merger or continuing independent? Merger with MLA 7%; National Council 2%; continuing independence 89%.
7. Title of our publication. Retain present title 84%.

A list of other titles suggested may be amusing:

College English Letter
English Bulletin
CEA Forum
Gazette of CEA
College English Ledger
CEA Chap Book
College English Teacher
Gazette
English Forum
The CEA Journal
Pro and Con
CEA Letter
College English Forum
College English Associate
College English Exchange
Gazette of the CEA
CEA Communications
CEA News
News and Views

Members turned their ballot forms into correspondence cards and sent a wide variety of comments addressed to the secretary or to the Association in general. Many of these messages are reprinted here.

"I think we should keep off trains until the transportation peak has been well passed."

"Merger: The right solution, in my opinion, is the 'Modern Language Teachers Association', that is, the MLA in its education aspect. Let MLA stand for research, but let it recognize its educational responsibility by forming itself into a parallel MLTA. The MLTA would be composed of several divisions: teachers of German, of French, etc., and teachers of English."

"Each officer of CEA should be available for something for the "News Letter" during the year. This would include the President—or else the President's address should be printed as a brochure until annual meetings are resumed. (Perhaps after, as well.)

"Possibly some college administrators might attribute more value to publication in a periodical with a less informal name (I like it, myself)."

"I know nothing which I read with more pleasure or with a greater sense of fellowship."

"If expanded to magazine form it might then be appropriately renamed."

"I like 'News Letter' with its implicit promise of brevity."

"To my way of thinking the News Letter is the most promising bulletin of any English group for freshness and freedom of atmosphere. I like its emancipation from "pure research" and its absorption in very practical, live, necessary problems. Merger? No!"

"Merger, if another association can be imbued with the spirit of CEA."

"I'm not convinced of its necessity, but it should be continued a while longer anyway."

"No strong opinion as to open meetings, but on the whole I think members and invited guests should do the talking at any meeting—no harm in having others as spectators."

"I should welcome non-members as auditors; but as participants,—no. If they are interested enough to participate, why should they not join? As to serving on a committee, my age (78) with a heavy schedule of work make it impossible for me to give the time and thought that such duties would require."

"When annual meetings are again held, I favor allowing non-members to attend, for a few years to see whether this procedure increases the membership; if not, then cancel the privilege."

"Merger? I don't know. A larger organization would have more weight in a country the size of the U.S.A. That is a realistic view, whether we like it or not."

Discipline

May I register in your paper my low opinion of what is called "progressive education" as it is frequently, conspicuously and damagingly put into practice.

The kind of "progressive education" I mean may help to develop a few Quiz Kids and prodigies, but prodigies, however entertaining they may sometimes be, aren't what we need. The thing we need if we are going to have a successful democracy is an educated, intelligent and disciplined nation, and if discipline doesn't begin in infancy it isn't likely to begin at all.

It appears to me that the discipline of young America has quite steadily deteriorated since the introduction of "progressive education" and that this kind of education and the parent are jointly responsible for a tragic failure.

"Let the child study whatever he wants to" may be all right in a few cases, but the average child—and one might include the average young man and young woman of college age—is entirely unfit to decide on the courses of study that will provide the best equipment for life.

A distinguished American psychiatrist, head of a highly successful institution for repairing mental misfits, has said: "Education without discipline isn't education. If when Johnny cuts off the piano-leg with his toy axe we say he must not be interfered with because he is entitled to express himself, we must not be surprised when after he grows up Johnny puts a bigger axe into somebody's head. This fancy 'modern education' is fine for my business but not for the human race."

If the parent and the teacher would cooperate on disciplining our young, I'd be more hopeful about the future. . . . I also have a notion that if I knew more of normal schools I'd not approve of most of them. I gather the impression that normal school trainees don't learn subjects but learn to teach subjects that perhaps they don't know.

—Julian Street,
Lakeville, Conn.

"Every time I play tennis I don't try to change the tennis court. . . . In fact, I think I play better tennis because the court is there."

—Robert Frost in
"Good Writing"

"The undisciplined individual is free only to do things badly. Untrained in tennis he is free to miss every shot. Untutored in the strings of a violin he is licensed to produce hideous sounds."

—Mark Van Doren
in "Liberal Education"

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THE NEWS LETTER

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BURGES JOHNSON
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State Teachers College, Pittsburg, Kas.

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Membership in the College English Association, including THE NEWS LETTER, $2.00 a year. Subscription for Libraries, $1.50.

Editorial

Back in the days of the first World War we boarded a train and found ourselves sitting next to an old college acquaintance. His conversation with the conductor revealed he was a person of importance in the eyes of trainmen and we asked him "How come?" He answered "You evidently don't know it, but I am a railroad president." Then he went on to explain that his was probably the shortest independent railway in the United States; so small, in fact, that it had been overlooked when the government took over the management of all American railroads. "But I want to tell you" he said with feeling "that it has all the troubles that any other railroads have. It has had strikes, and washouts, and shortage of rolling stock, and financial troubles, and the President of the Missouri-Pacific or the Atlantic Coast line can't boast any more than that."

We have thought of that long-ago conversation as we have tried to surmount the difficulties of editing a four-page paper. We might paraphrase and say "We have had advertising troubles, and paper shortage, and difficulties with authors, and inevitable printing problems; can the editor of Harper's, or The Saturday Evening Post say more than that?"

Just at the present moment we are finding our way out of what seemed to be a hopeless impasse. Inevitable delays due to advertising copy, and holding up the presses for timely articles were small matters compared to the difficulties of the printer, whose compositors seemed to be especially singled out by the government to manufacture tanks or destroy the Germans. As a result, our highest hope now has been to bring the paper out within the month of issue. We have thought of another railroad man of our acquaintance who said he never could decide whether to make trains try to catch up with schedule, or delay them a little longer so they could run through a little ahead of time the next day.

But the sky is clearing and we wish to remind our fellow members of the CEA that five years ago we promised this paper would appear approximately eight times in the year at approximately the tenth of the month of issue.

Throughout the five years there have been those who protested its informality and its limitation upon length and character of articles. They would have it expand into just another pedagogical periodical full of weighty treatises and reprints of learned lectures. But any questioning of any group of members has always proved these folk to be in the minority.

If we grew into that sort of a magazine we would at least always have plenty of material, for too many feel the necessity of "getting into print." It makes little difference what is printed, or whether anyone reads it, so long as the writer can report to the Administration that another learned treatise has been published. Whereas a paper such as this depends upon the loyal support of member-contributors who believe they should give as well as receive.

Dear CEA Member, whatever your rank or condition of servitude, please consider this a postcard addressed to you personally, and respond by return mail with a lively bit for the next issue.

In this issue we publish a second installment of notes on articles of possible interest to our membership. These have been compiled by Miss Amy Hall of the University of Washington, with the aid of a committee of her own choosing, which she would like to expand if sufficient interest is manifested in the result. Have our members any suggestions as to the usefulness of such a list, supplementing as it does the Periodical Index? Would it be of greater value if confined to articles which bear directly upon classroom problems within our own field? Or is the field of English so all-embracing in its interests that no limitation at all is better than a confining one?

Gleaned From the Mail

Dear Editor:

Since its beginning I have not been a member of the CEA and have read the News Letter only occasionally. However, there may be some significance to the fact that I have not joined the association and have not read the "Letter" regularly, because it has been difficult for me to see any very real justification for the creation of such an organization. Granted that the national council has not been all that one might wish it to be, and that the college edition of the English Journal has been deficient in a consistently humanistic approach to the problems of teaching English, yet it seems to me we would be likely to accomplish a great deal more with one group at work than with two, who inevitably come to feel that they are in competition with each other.

And if one feels a lack of vision and a great deal of pedantry at times in the "English Journal," it is equally true (at least this has been my experience) that the CEA News Letter has been almost completely lacking in vitality, indeed, in anything except now and then a furious assertion of some teaching plans that cannot be construed as enriching very greatly the teaching of English. Perhaps that stems from the fact that the thousand-word limitation keeps good writers from submitting material.

I think from a purely practical standpoint such regional meetings as are held here in Kansas are more useful to teachers in the field than an elaborate and sometimes top-heavy national association which, once it is set up, has to strive desparately to justify itself.

In all honesty perhaps I should admit that if I had been a member of the CEA from its inception, I might feel differently. But the fact is that I have not been a member, because I have felt as I have indicated here. I am afraid this may not be grist for your mill to grind; but if any of this will be useful to you, you are perfectly at liberty to publish it.

—J. W. Ashton,
Univ. of Kansas.

Dear Editor:

May I either by honest payment or by corrupt practice become a subscriber to "The News Letter"? It wanders in fields that are dear to me. There are three "For instances" on page one:

In reading the first essay, into my head popped the fact that recently I have quoted Kipling's phrase, "The Curse of Reuben", to three college "graduates" — and none of them had an inkling.

"Legal English" reminded me that lawyers, when they "have learned to use the English language properly", are, by reason of rigid training in precision, among our best writers—Maitland, Mayne, Hamilton, Madison, Warren, et al.

I note with approval that Mr. Williams puts inverted commas about "duration". If this form is to be used, why not "enduration" and "assuration"? The centuries-older word is Durance, shorter, more euphonious and not long-tailed and long-eared.

A fourth "for instance" is the Editor's opinion of enthused reformers that try to hurry Time.

Please . . . let me be a subscriber.

—W. J. Boardman.

My dear Editor:

I think your December and January numbers are interesting and most creditable to your editorship. In case the vote does go for the continuance of the present officers, I want you to print the enclosed letter.

Henry S. Canby.

Dear Editor:

I am naturally flattered and pleased by my continuation in office as president of the CEA for another year, although I feel I have made very little contribution beyond my enthusiasm for the project. In later years when we can begin to meet again, I feel sure that our common belief in the Association will lead to highly important results.

But I wish to announce the formation of a Burges Johnson-for-President Club to begin operations at the next annual election, of which I may be the first member, but certainly will not be long alone. What the CEA owes to him can never be justly appreciated, and I should like to see leadership go to someone more closely in touch with the academic world than, thanks to my duties in New York and my absence from Yale, I am likely to be.

Henry S. Canby.

(Editor's Note: Your editor hesitates to give still more space to the above peremptory communication from our President. But he would like to comment in scathing tones that it is easier to find really distinguished presidents who are not bothered very much by presidential tasks than it is to find executive secretaries who will work without salary. Would it not be better to leave the present condition undisturbed until we make a real drive for membership and get sufficient income to be able to engage an executive secretary with youth and pep and initiative!)

Dear Editor:

If you haven't read the Report of a Joint Commission of the Council for Education in World Citizenship and the London International Association, "Education and the United Nations," be sure to do so. It is published by the American Council of Public Affairs. 112 pages, 1943.

—Amy V. Hall,
University of Washington.

Of Ending With With

I think that our discussion of a preposition (or an adverb, or a separable prefix, or the sign of the infinitive) at the end of a sentence, is something we are proceeding with with too few examples of. If this deficiency is not taken care of, our conclusions may not prove to mean as much as we expect them to. The gradual compilation of an exhaustive list is a worthy effort, which, fortunately, I can contribute two examples (unfortunately not original) to. I hope No. 1 is one I beat my friend Harlan Hamilton to you with. No. 2 is so old it may possibly be one of those things that for years no one has thought of.

No. 1. To what the hell are you up? (Or, more correctly, Up to what the hell are you?)

No. 2. Boy: I want to be read to.

Nurse: What do you want to be read to out of?

Boy: "Robinson Crusoe".

(Nurse goes out and reappears with "Swiss Family Robinson".)

Boy: What did you bring this book for me to be read to out of for?

—Weldon M. Williams,
Kent State University.

Dear Editor:

I was interested in your comment that English teachers were not prepared to teach composition, and I noted that you did not recommend a separate department of composition. I was glad of that, since I've seen one working for the past ten years or so. Every once in a while some professor elsewhere writes me and says that the solution for his troubles is probably a division of departments such as we have. I always write back ,and say it ain't true. Jealousies, contests for new and overlapping courses, fights over visiting celebrities in the field of English ,square pegs in round holes, etc. mar our happiness.

I stress jealousies and bitterness, but there's much more than that. E.g., one hires a teacher of playwriting who goes to the department of composition. However, this man naturally knows far more than any one else about contemporary drama. May he then teach the course in modern drama in the lit. department? E.g., again, a student comes to college to major in English. Who gets him? Also who gets the ones who are studying to teach English in the public schools, where they will teach both lit. and composition? E.g., again, if Stevenson, Franklin, etc. achieved a good style by reading and imitation, should the comp. dep't be allowed to read past authors (lit.) if they write imitations? E.g., again, where do language courses, modern rhetoric, semantics, etc. belong? All the situations in this paragraph arise even without any particular jealousy. . . .

There are doubtless good answers to the present difficulties, such as your suggestions and others still to be proposed. But a separate department of composition is not one of them.

A Loyal Member.

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English As a Liberal Study

(Continued from Page One)

critic of effects if he were better trained as a critic of ideas. But a peculiar genius is required in the first case, whereas an educated humanity is sufficient in the second.

When this is absent, the reason is likely to be that the teacher himself has been taught English literature rather than literature. There is an important difference between the two. If English literature is great, it is great as literature. But of what does such greatness consist, and in how many other places can it be found? It is not universally required of English students that they know Greek literature; a doctor of philosophy can be ignorant of Homer. This makes him provincial, and it leaves him embarrassed when he is called upon to be serious and sincere, whether in his judgment of a modern masterpiece or in his discourse concerning the fundamentals, philosophical and moral, in which humanity is trained.

. . . . . .

If there is merit in the proposal that English departments be abolished in favor of departments which shall have literature in the large as their concern—and ultimately that all departments be abolished, but this is something to be discussed in another connection—the reason is not that English literature is a little thing, but that it is taught as such. It has become a specialty; that is, a subject the importance of which no one is educated to know. The advanced study of it today is a scandal too seldom denounced. Students improve their knowledge not of it but about it. The "sheer science" of it as a subject "can be and often is mastered," says Albert Jay Nock, "by one who is completely lacking in its spirit or in comprehension of its content." This can mean either that such a man is helpless when he is face to face with it as art or childish when he has to say what it is about.

Literary scholarship as we know it is most at home among the small books it can explain, the imperfect ones that have palpable sources in other books. The great books whose source is all books and all life are not to be explained so easily; and none of them can be explained away. Many professors of English behave as though they would like to explain literature away; that, for them, would be mastering it. The error lies in their own education, which probably was not an education even in the works of one great writer. If all students of English were set to studying Shakespeare, who is so much the greatest of English writers that this might be no more than simply sensible, the result could be, in the first place, a generation of teachers who knew their business; it could be, in the second place, a striking advance in our knowledge of Shakespeare. There are no signs at the moment that such a project would be considered anything but insane.

English as a language gains nothing, either, by being the business of a department. It seems to have been better taught when everybody taught it. For it has to do with the arts of reading and writing, and those are arts that all must know, based as they are upon the grammar, the logic, and the rhetoric which anywhere make thought and expression possible, and which everywhere should be the concern of teachers. As things stand they are left to the teacher of English; who, however, has as little love for logic as he has patience with grammar, and who in the average case shares the contemporary view that rhetoric is vulgar. Nothing more need be said here about the weakness of teachers for making reading easy the hard way—that is, the dull and unrewarding way of inferior books, even of textbooks to which the classics are "supplementary". . . .

But liberal education is not everything except science; it is not a remnant of "other things" toward which we must be pious. If science is master of the intellectual arts proper to the conduct of its affairs, then science is liberal too; and letters should learn from it how to be something better than the extra, the additional, the amateur army they now seem to be. Science has no doubt of its importance. Letters must have, or they would not speak of themselves as "also important". Perhaps they can learn from science how to take care of themselves. In the long run this might mean that they would know how to take care of science.

Pidgin

Mr. Sayer's book "Pidgin English" does not make a sharp enough distinction between 'bechede mer' and Chinese Pidgin.

Chinese Pidgin, when correctly used, is definitely based upon Chinese syntax and isn't just English with distorted words. For instance, a visitor enters a Shanghai hotel looking for a visiting English Bishop. He asks the clerk if the Bishop is in. The clerk calls, "Boy, you go top-side look-see number one Joss-man have got no have got." The boy returns in a few minutes and says "Have got", and the clerk turns to the visitor and says "The Bishop is in." That sentence is based on Chinese and can be translated directly into Chinese without altering any word except "number one Joss-man". Even so, the "number one" would be "i-wei", the word "wei" being numeratively used as a sign of high rank.

You might call attention to the chapters in Jespersen's and in Bloomfield's Book on Language on Pidgin English and to the very extensive use of Papiamento in the Dutch West Indies and along the Venezuelan coast.

Another tendency in the book is not to make clear the difference between bad English, the so-called baba English of India, and a real Pidgin language. The latter, as Mr. Sayer correctly says, undoubtedly developed in China first.

My own feeling for the development of the term is that it is quite likely to have been as much a corruption of the Chinese word for business which is "shih ching", pronounced shur without the "r" and jing, as it is of the English word "business".

—George H. Danton.

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Art. "Balinese Sculpture"
"Life", Oct. 25, 1943.
Woodcarvings of these Malayan people display a very well developed sense of humor. Five reproductions accompany the article.

Attitudes. "Browning's Message for Dark Days"
"English Journal", October, 1943, 13-18.
The robust optimism, the joy in life and in struggle, that underlie Browning's work make him a good companion for the present era of doubt and hesitation.

Chinese Art. Hobson, W., "An Album of Chinese Paintings"
"Life", October 11, 1943, 62-8.
Twelve color reproductions of some of the greatest work of Chinese artists, illustrating the Taoist outlook upon man and nature, and demonstrating subtle mastery of potent line.

Education. DeVane, William Clyde, "American Education After the War."
"Yale Review", Autumn, 1943, 34-36.
'The function of a good college may be said to be threefold: to provide a general education broad in scope; to arrange programs of a moderate concentration which will give the student a sense of mastery in a particular field; and to bring him to that point of maturity at which he is capable of genuinely independent work.' Professor DeVane stresses the necessity for a philosophical synthesis of what we know of nature, man, and his history, and his destiny. (M. J. Mederith)

Education. Doherty, Robert E. "Complacency in Confusion"
"Journal of Engineering Education", Nov., 1943, 210-15.
For a real education, let each college student insist on understanding fully what he learns. Only through his own exertions can he gain the four essentials: knowledge of the few basic principles, a personal philosophy, human appreciation, and the ability to attack and solve his problems. Initiative is vital.

Education. "The Boom in Books"
"Fortune", Nov., 1943, 142 ff.
Willkie's 'One World' in the two-dollar edition sold 250,000 copies; in the one-dollar, a million. Pocket Books, in four years, has sold 50 million copies, detective stories not leading. Each month 50,000 copies of 30 titles go to the armed forces. Sears Roebuck has a book club. Will taste standardize?

Education. Wanger, Walter F. "The Motion Picture in the Fight for Freedom"
"Free World", Nov., 1943, 443-7.
Most democratic of the three great media of communication, the motion picture industry is helpnig to bring before its 16,000 audiences ideas essential to the coming spiritual and social reconstruction, and has donated for military use about seven thousand 16-mm. prints.

Humanism. Broudy, H. S. "Disinterested Curiosity and Social Concern"
"Jour. Higher Ed., Nov., 1943. 426-50.
The teacher of technical subjects, we say, should develop in his students responsibility for use of science to further human advance. Is not this need even more pressing upon the teacher of the humanities?
(Also, "Toward Scientific Humanism" by Morris Goran, pp. 435-8).

Integration. Payne-Gaposchkin, Cecilia, "The Scholar and the World."
"American Scientist", Oct., 1943. 329-37.
No longer is the ivory tower permissible. Astronomy has advanced by aid of the other sciences and of internationalism. As the outlook of the scientist is enriched by that of artist, social reformer, and saint, so must the American outlook be enriched by that of other lands — retaining always the scientist's belief in fundamentals and in progress, which is change.

Language. "Basic English: A Global anguage," by Lionel Barnett
"Life", Oct. 16, 1943. 57-64.
The complete word list is given here, and the Gettysburg Address in Basic. The structure of the language is explained; its merits are discussed, with specific examples.

Language. Nicholas, William H. "The World's Words"
"National Geographic", December, 1943, 689-700.
English, the governmental language for one-third of the world (700 million) has succeeded French as the language of diplomacy, German as the language of science. Three-quarters of the letters sent are in English, half the newspapers, three-fifths of the broadcasts. Hindustan (160 million) is next, then Russian (145 million) and Spanish (115 million).

Japan. "The 47 Ronin"—a popular play.
"Life", Nov. 1, 1943, 52-5.
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